

# Exploring the Latin Mentality

By Russell Baker

For all who are completely lost in the legal squirrel cage of Watergate, here is a concise guide that will clarify everything:

Congress had been wondering whether to impeach the President. When the President heard about this he hired a lawyer.

When Congress heard the President hired a lawyer, Congress hired two lawyers.

The President immediately hired two more, which gave him three lawyers and put him ahead of Congress by a score of 3 to 2. He has been ahead ever since.

The President's lawyers sent to Congress's lawyers a *nolo contendere*, which is lawyer's Latin meaning "I prefer not to argue," but nobody could understand why they preferred not to argue because the explanation was written in lawyer's English.

Congress's lawyers quickly countered with a *mandamus* (a command to Amos) and a *habeas corpus* ("Do you have the corpse?").

The President's lawyers moved to quash, and Congress's lawyers countered with a subpoena *duces tecum* ("May the dukes take them!").

With matters at this impasse, both sides conferred in chambers with the judge to ask if he remembered what the case was about and, if so, if he would refresh their memories.

The judge said it was an impeachment-of-the-President case.

The President's lawyers laughed (*ex parte ho ho ho*) and said the case was ridiculous because it was impossible to impeach a President.

"*Quo vadis?*" said the court. ("Surely you are kidding?").

"You see," said the President's lawyers, "since a President can only be impeached for committing serious crimes, and since no President can be tried in a criminal court, and since, therefore, no President can be found guilty of serious crimes, there are no grounds, therefore, upon which a President may be impeached."

Congress's lawyers cross-examined. "But can Congress not sit in judgment of a President?"

"Congress can indeed do that," said the President's lawyers, "but it cannot convict."

"Why not?" asked Congress's lawyers.

"Just try it," explained the President's lawyers.

So Congress's lawyers sent to the President's lawyers and asked for some evidence the President had.

The President's lawyers said that Congress could have some of the evidence, but not all of the evidence. Then it sent to Congress a lot of evidence that made the President look good, but not all the evidence.

Congress's lawyers complained that they hadn't received all the evidence they had asked for.

The President's lawyer said they had all the evidence they needed in order not to find the President guilty of any serious crimes.

Congress's lawyers asked the President's lawyers under what doctrine a man being investigated could withhold all evidence except evidence he wanted the court to have.

The President's lawyers explained that this was the doctrine of *de Presidentibus nil nisi bonum*, which is lawyer's Latin meaning "Speak no

evil of Presidents, even in court."

Congress's lawyers said they had never heard of that doctrine.

The President's lawyers said that was probably because the President had just made it up.

Congress's lawyers moved to quash the doctrine.

The President's lawyers urged the court not to hear the quash motion until everyone had a vacation, and in the meantime, requested a writ of

public laughter at Congress, moved to have all proceedings suspended until the full record of everything that had gone before could be translated into Latin and filed motions for impeachment of the entire Congress on the grounds of wasting time.

"*Omnia Gallia*," as lawyers familiar with the old *tres partes* doctrine know, used to be divided into three parts; now all gall resides in one White House.